

Young worker dies in Detroit area house fire

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A young worker was killed in a Hazel Park house fire—just north of Detroit—caused by a space heater on Saturday night. No information has been released about his identity other than that he was 24 years old and a resident of Pontiac. The home on the 1700 block of Granet Avenue was apparently unoccupied, and neighbors say the victim was part of a crew that was renovating the structure.

Whether he was staying overnight in the home or working late is not clear. In any case he was asleep in the bedroom when the space heater ignited the blaze. The bedroom door was closed and isolated the fire to the bedroom.

Captain Russell Paul of the Hazel Park Fire Department told the WSWs that they knew the identity of the victim, but they weren't releasing his name until they knew the family was informed. The exact cause of the blaze is still uncertain. The Oakland County Sheriff's Department is pursuing the investigation, according to Captain Paul.

Hazel Park borders the northern limit of Detroit proper. Foreclosed homes checker the neighborhoods and the once stable home of auto and other manufacturing workers is dotted with signs of poverty.

Anticipating a new wave of house fires with the onset of the cold season and knowing that many residents are facing both gas and electrical shutoffs, Detroit Fire Commissioner James Mack gave a well-publicized demonstration on the proper use of space heaters. Also the Detroit Fire Department has been campaigning through selected neighborhoods and installing free smoke detectors in households that need them.

In the face of energy company DTE's shutting off utilities to thousands more households in southeast Michigan this year, these activities amount to little more than a drop in the bucket. In addition, budget cuts have closed many firehouses, laid off firefighters and

strapped the remaining manpower, as seen in the fires that raged through Detroit on September 7. The fire death in Hazel Park is a sign of what will come this winter.

Space heaters are responsible for 72 percent of fire-related deaths. (See "Citizens Inquiry into the Dexter Avenue fire: Utility Shutoffs and the social crisis in Detroit: Findings of the Commission")



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